

# SOUTH INDIAN GILDS

(Illustrated)

WITH A NOTE FROM

The Late Dr. MARSHALL OF CAMBRIDGE

BY

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TO

THE REVERED MEMORY

OF THE LATE

**Dr. ALFRED MARSHALL**

BY THE AUTHOR,

A HUMBLE STUDENT OF HIS WORKS.

A Note from the Late Dr. MARSHALL  
of Cambridge

BALLIOL CROFT,  
MADINGLEY ROAD,  
CAMBRIDGE.

*March 21, 1923.*

DEAR SIR,

Very many years ago I took some little interest in the relations between Indian gilds and early English gilds. I never knew much about either side of this matter and I used to regard as a special form of caste, what I now gather might properly be regarded as a gild. But, I am deeply interested in the fact that the term 'gild' is appropriate for use in describing some forms of Indian caste. The very interesting problems thus raised are not within my range; and my little remaining strength is quickly fading away. . . . If it were necessary to grant you permission to dedicate your work to me, I should have great pleasure in doing so.

*Yours very truly*

*Alfred Marshall*

To

K. R. R. SASTRY, ESQ., M.A.

## PREFACE

SINCE 1919, the present author has been collecting data of existing trade gilds in South India and particularly in the Districts of Tinnevelly, Madura, Trichinopoly, Tanjore, South Arcot, Chingleput and Salem. Mr. (now Sir) Alfred Chatterton's remark (January, 1902) that he was not 'aware of the existence of trade gilds in the Presidency except at Madura,' will, it is hoped, be modified in the light of the data presented in this work. It is contended by this worker that India has preserved her distinct *personality* in the form of these gilds, which are solving partially and bound to solve fully many of the 'isms' of the West, if the suggested lines of resuscitation are considered in time by those in power.

To my Professor Radhakamal Mukherjea of the Lucknow University, I am ever in duty bound to pay homage for drawing my attention to the study of social problems.

When Dr. Marshall (now no more) wrote to me that 'his little remaining strength was quickly fading away,' I little thought that I could dedicate this work only in memory of that great thinker.

I have to thank the Editorial Board of the *Journal of the Indian Economic Society*, Bombay, where a portion of this work appeared in the course of 1922.

The Diocesan Press, Madras, deserves to be remembered for the unfailing courtesy of its staff and the neat get-up of the work.

K. R. R. SASTRY.

THE LAW COLLEGE,  
MADRAS,  
*July 6, 1925.*

# SOUTH INDIAN GILDS

## CHAPTER I

### EARLY NOTICES

Local Self-administration and the ubiquitous Punchayat are among the East's rich and successful experiments in communal life and organization and the rehabilitation of these will be attended with much better results than the introduction of ready-made systems from abroad.—*Prof. Radhakamal Mukherjea.*

‘If the economic historian aims at discovering the hidden springs of the economic order of the world and at obtaining light from the past to guidance in the present, he should avail himself of every resource that may help him to detect real differences that are disguised by a similarity of name or outward appearance, and real similarities that are obscured by a superficial difference.’ This dictum of Prof. Marshall is equally applicable to the economic student whose aim is to resuscitate a fast tottering fabric after a careful study of its present position.

The need for a study of the decaying trade gilds is evident after a close study of the *Industrial Education Report* (1903) and the latest, Sir Thomas Holland’s. In his enclosure, dated January 15, 1902, Mr. (now Sir) Alfred Chatterton wrote thus: ‘I am not aware of the existence of any trade gilds in this presidency except at Madura, where the weavers who belong to the Saurashtra community have started an association with the avowed object of improving the condition of their trade.’ It is quite true that many of these gilds have ceased to have their former influence owing to a variety of causes, economic and political; but the many vernaculars denoting their several trade organizations

are still used to mean the particular trade which their members used to follow in days of gild economy. The aim of the present writer is to present the working of gilds among artisans in South India with special reference to Madura; when the necessary criteria are present though without the name, it is reasonable to frame a resuscitation of these gilds of ancient renown. Besides, the finding of the Clibborn Committee on Industrial Education (1903)<sup>1</sup> is as favourable as any report can be. Runs the report, 'These organizations (gilds) judiciously led, could exercise a powerful influence for good, both educationally and in the introduction of improvements.'

The method of examining witnesses is the one adopted with a fair degree of success by Dr. Slater. The man on the spot questions the representative witnesses of each craft with the aid of a number of questions specifically framed for the purpose. This method is *per se* imperfect in one sense, since it depends on the thoroughness of the enquiry which itself rests upon the intelligence and tact of the questioner who has to tune himself to the susceptibilities of the witnesses (some of whom in the present case were habituated to drinking, e.g. the Pavukkara Naiks). The necessary zeal, tact, and sympathy being present in the questioner, this difficulty can be easily tided over; for, this method is different from Le Play's which requires a rare combination of judgment in selecting cases. Indebtedness to Appendix VI of the Clibborn Committee is here to be acknowledged, since the answers of witnesses on gilds have enabled the present writer to frame some valuable questions.

It is pertinent to note the work done by these gilds

\* Vide *Industrial Education Report*, 1903, part i, p. 10.

in ancient India. According to Prof. Rhys Davids,<sup>1</sup> in the early Buddhistic times, there were sixteen different types of gilds including as many crafts. These gilds (*sreni, puga*) were very useful institutions in olden times, and it was through them that the king summoned the people on important occasions. They settled disputes between members by arbitration and maintained high standards in production. Their business was conducted in assembly and their presidents (*Nayaks* or *Mukhyas*) occupied high positions in society.<sup>2</sup> Charitable establishments in aid of *Dharma* were erected, and maintained not only by the State but also by gilds of merchants.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Romesh Chandra Majumdar establishes in his work on 'Corporate Life in Ancient India,' the fact that gild-organization continued down to the latest days of the Hindu period. The term *Ganasah* in the *Brihad-Aranyak-Upanishad* refers to the Vaisyas. As early as the later Vedic period, we come across a fairly developed form of corporate activity in ancient 'India'.<sup>4</sup> A Jataka story refers to a village of 500 robbers with an elder at their head. Such an organization of robbers was met by the counter-organization of traders to which again a reference is made in a number of Jataka stories. The use of the words *sreshthi* and *gana* in Vedic literature constitutes the sole evidence. The word *sreshthin* is interpreted by many as 'the headman of a gild.'

Eighteen gilds are mentioned in the *Muga-pakka*

<sup>1</sup> *Buddhist India*, Prof. Rhys Davids, pp. 90-93.

<sup>2</sup> From Dr. Bannerjea's *Public Administration in Ancient India* and *Inscriptions from Belgaum* (1204), edited by L. D. Barnett.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed description of these gilds in ancient India, *vide* Prof. R. C. Majumdar's *Corporate Life in Ancient India* and Dr. Radhakumud Mukherjea's *Local Government in Ancient India*.

<sup>4</sup> Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, ch. i, p. 12. A summary of the chapter is alone attempted here; my indebtedness to the learned doctor is indeed immeasurable.

*Jataka.* The following twenty-seven kinds of artisans are mentioned by Professor Majumdar :—

1. Workers in wood.	17. Cultivators.
2. Workers in metal.	18. Fisher-folk.
3. Workers in stone.	19. Butchers.
4. Leather-workers.	20. Barbers and sham-pooers.
5. Ivory-workers.	21. Garland makers and flower sellers.
6. Workers fabricating hydraulic engines.	
7. Bamboo-workers.	22. Mariners.
8. Braziers.	23. Herds-men.
9. Jewellers.	24. Traders.
10. Weavers.	25. Robbers and free-booters.
11. Potters.	26. Forest police who guarded the caravan.
12. Oil-millers.	
13. Basket-makers.	
14. Dyers.	
15. Painters.	27. Money-lenders.
16. Corn-dealers.	

During the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. the heredity of profession, the localization of the different branches of industry and the institution of *Jetthaka* (aldermen) seem to have characterized the gilds of artisans. The heads of these gilds sometimes held high posts in the State and were favourites of the king. One of the *Jataka* stories refers to a State officer—the *Bhandāgarika*—whose office carried with it the judgeship of all the merchant-gilds.

During the early Dharmasutra period (fifth century B.C. to the third century B.C.) we find these corporations recognized by the constitution. Two disciplinary rules laid down in the *Vinayaka-pitaka* are (1) that the gild was entitled to arbitrate on certain occasions between its members and their wives and (2) that its sanction was necessary for the ordination of the wife of any of its members. In *Kautilya*, special concessions

are given to gild merchants. *Srenivala* in Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is translated as 'soldiers maintained by the gilds' by Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar.

Later from second century B.C. to fourth century A.D. *Manu Samhita* refers to *sreni dharma* or 'usages' of the gilds.' The king is to banish any one who breaks gild laws. Five inscriptions of the period found at Nasik and Junnar refer to gilds and the custom of investing sums in the gilds. An inscription at Gwalior refers to a Board of *Sreshthies* and *Sārthavāhas*. Gilds served as local banks; and a *Mukhya* or chief is always mentioned with reference to these corporate institutions.

During the later Dharmashastra period (fifth to seventh century A.D.), the *raison d'être* of these gilds as given in *Brihaspathi* resolves itself into

- (a) prevention of danger and
- (b) proper discharge of members' duties.

Certain formalities which accompanied the formation of a new gild are also mentioned:—

(a) The first step was to inspire mutual confidence among the intending members.

(b) A curious custom called *Kosha* or the drinking of sacred water, puts it down that, if a new applicant survives for a fortnight after drinking this water, he is considered a worthy member of the gild.

(c) By *Lekha-Kunja* was perhaps meant a convention laying down the rules and regulations of the gild.

(d) A *Madhyastha* is also freely mentioned during the period.

The functions of these gilds according to *Brihaspathi Samhita* are:—

- (a) The construction of a House of Assembly.
- (b) The construction of a shed for water, a temple, a pool or a garden.
- (c) Helping the poor to perform *samskāras*.

The Inscription at Mandasor in W. Malwa, dated A.D. 473-474 (J. F. Fleet, *Gupta Inscriptions*, No. 18) describes how a gild of silk-weavers built a magnificent temple of the Sun.<sup>1</sup>

The constitution of these gilds is found to resolve itself into

(a) a *chief* assisted by two, three, or five Executive Officers. Only honest persons acquainted with the Vedas shall be appointed as Executive Officers. Failure to perform one's duties was often punished by confiscation of entire property and by banishment from entire town. An appeal from the president to the king always existed.

(b) There was also a House of Assembly.

By the seventh century A.D. the gild was recognized as a corporation; gilds possessed immovable property; the Executive Officers could contract loans on behalf of the gild; charitable and religious deeds were performed by gilds; and one could cease to be a member of a gild if he chose to do so.

In later periods, the inscription at the Vaillabhatta Swami temple at Gwalior, dated A.D. 877 and the Pehoa Inscription refer to endowments and Executive Officers of the gild. A gild of horse-dealers from the northern country is also referred to in the Harsha Stone Inscription, dated A.D. 973-974. The Sujadoni Inscriptions of the latter half of the tenth century A.D. also record the gift of the gilds of betel-sellers, oil-makers, and stone-cutters. One has to conclude this topic with Dr. R. C. Majumdar that 'gild organization continued down to the latest days of the Hindu period.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vide *The Indian Antiquary*, vol. xv, p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, p. 71.

## CHAPTER II

### TOWN GILDS

They organized themselves into gilds, thus increasing their cohesion and educating themselves in self-government. *Marshall.*<sup>1</sup>

INITIALLY, the ground has to be cleared from misconception. There are almost perfect organizations in particular crafts though they have not been dubbed, say as 'the gilds of carpenters.' When the substance is found, it is puerile to disregard it if one misses the shadow. As very appositely remarked by Prof. Radhakamal Mukherjea, 'in cities where there is a large number of workmen artisans and traders who do not belong to the gild, the power diminishes, unless as is very often the case, different gilds mutually support one another and form a loose union to protect themselves from the forces of competition and exploitation from outside.'

#### *The Pancha-Brahma Sabhai of Madura*

The community of Pancha-Brahma-Sabhaiar (lit. *Pancha*=five, *Brahma*=pertaining to Brahma, the four-headed God of creation, *Sabhaiar*=associates, viz. the associates of the five castes descended from Brahma) has got intact almost all their ancient ties of kinship and trade organization. These number among them the five craft divisions of carpenters (*tachchan*), blacksmiths (*kollan*), stone-masons (*kaltachchan*), goldsmiths (*thattan*) and brass-smiths (*karumān*). The names are common to the whole of the Tamil country. In Madura proper, these consist of seven divisions, the two other additions being two different castes of goldsmiths. They are

<sup>1</sup> Marshall, *Principles*, p. 735.

known respectively as, *kollavahuppu* (*vahuppu*=class), *tachchavahuppu*, *kannaravahuppu*, *kaltachchavahuppu*, *telunguvahuppu*, *mathagavahuppu* and *thekkuthivahuppu*. (*Thekkuthi*=southern, perhaps an emigrated unit from the South.) Here as elsewhere, it is difficult to know when exactly their gild was formed. As usual with everything Indian, the artisans refer to the tradition, which traces their common origin to Viswakarma,<sup>1</sup> the reputed Father of Indian Architecture. Intermarriage between these different castes is not uncommon. The son of a blacksmith may become a carpenter or a copper-smith and *vice versa*. Their holidays are generally those of the Hindus. Especially do they celebrate Sri Rama Navami, Ayuda Puja Day and all New Moon days. It is remarkable that in a big city like Madura, the artisans in the southern part of the Meenakshi temple are under a *Periadhanakkaran*, (lit. means 'a rich man') comparable to the alderman of the medieval gilds. Further in the western portion of the city there are different *Nattamais* (lit. means 'headmen') owing no allegiance to the *Periadhanakkaran* in the southern half.

#### *Gild Officials*

In the southern part of the city there are seven *Nattamais* under the *Periadhanakkaran*, each representing a *vahuppu*, respectively. Under these *Nattamais* there are *Kariasthars* (Secretaries) who come next in rank. One of these *Nattamais* tells the present writer that 'the *Periadhanakkaran*'s words are law. He can fine us even twenty rupees.' 'This *Periadhanakkaran* is obeyed by people even thirty miles away' if they are related to any of these seven castes. All these *Nattamais* are trustees of the Kamakshi temple, their communal

<sup>1</sup> *Vide also The Travancore, Census Report for 1911, p. 260.*

centre of worship. The *Periadhanakkaran* has the first *thambūlam*<sup>1</sup> in all marriages. These officials are shown special regard in the temple. The *Kuriasthars* who are subordinate to the *Nattamai*, check the temple accounts and they look after in general the needs of the temple (called *varthana* in Tamil). There is another gild official called *Kamakshi Vadhiyar* (the temple priest). There are three *jadipillais* who are servants for all these gild officials. They do not get wages every month, but are given fees and presents on occasions of marriage and other festivities.

The *Periadhanakkaran* of Madura comparable to the *Shete* and *Shetya* of Gujerat and Konkan holds only a life-office while the rest have been found to be hereditary officers. In his status and functions, he resembles closely the *Shetya* of the Gujerati Banias.

### *The Poduppanam*

The term *Poduppanam* is worth a detailed study. This is a picturesque survival of the old gild funds. This communal fund is the net aggregate collected under the following heads:—

<i>Poduppanam</i>			
Proceeds during marriages	During nuptials	During deaths	Fines for contravention of rules.
Every marriage brings in		....	2 7 0
Income during nuptials is		....	1 3 6
Every death in a family of the mem- ber of a gild brings in ....		....	1 13 0

<sup>1</sup> The distribution of betels and nuts is called *thambūlam*, a common function during all marriages among the Hindus, and the first *thambūlam* denotes highest regard.

These marriage contributions are comparable to what was called in ancient times as *Kanna lakanam*. 'A record of Parantaka I (tenth century A.C.) found at Erode, in the Coimbatore District, registers the fact that the marriage fee to be paid by the bridegroom and the bride is  $\frac{1}{8}$  of a *panam* (1 *panam*=three annas and four pies) and that each *kudi* or family had to pay  $\frac{1}{2}$  a *panam1*

It is a striking coincidence that in Khandesh also, the *mahajan* of each gild is paid 7 pies by the bride and bridegroom.

Further, there are occasions when a *thalaikattu* (the English term 'poll-tax' is the nearest approach but not a happy synonym since the idea of external compulsion is alien to a contribution to the temple) is resorted to for Mari Amman (the powerful goddess of the Hindu artisans). This communal fund is entrusted to a fairly well-to-do man. Besides in times of cholera or other epidemics, a band of benevolent workers goes to every house with a plate and gets a *thalaikattu* of eight annas in order to propitiate the particular presiding deities.

Generally, these artisans have a holiday on the death of a brother-craftsman. The neighbours do make it a point of attending the funeral. The orphans and destitutes find succour for a few days in these people. Such conceptions as old age pensions are unknown. This is explicable when one takes into consideration the custom among the Hindus, of contributing to the institution of many choultries. Partly also, the tie between a father and son in India is a lasting one; and the son who disregards his parents in the evening of their lives is an object fit for social ostracism if need be.

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* K. V. S. Iyer's *Historical Sketches of Ancient Dekkan*, pp. 343, 344 and 348.

*The Punchayat and Its Powers*

The question whether the punchayat has got powers to fine moral recalcitrants is a sure index of the prevalence of gild-economy. In 1915, a relevant case happened. A widow who brought forth a child (a heinous crime among the Hindus) was ostracized by her father. Other relatives of the woman filed a suit for damages. All the four defendants (of whom our *Periadhankkaran* was one) were at last acquitted. The net result of the suit is that the moral offence was proved in open court. What is happening now is that all these seven caste-people have ostracized her during occasions of marriages and deaths. Unable to stand this moral opprobrium, the widow has taken farewell of Madura. This incident surely shows that the gild though recognized by these artisans is *legally* powerless to drive her away.

The composition of their punchayat affords a very interesting study. Generally, wise people who are good dialecticians are selected. They meet in the Kamakshi temple. This temple is their gild-hall. These halls are called in Malabar *Samuhamatams* (*Samuham* = assembly of people, *Matam* = hall). It is a striking fact that among the Lingayat Vanias, their meetings are held in religious houses or *mathas*. The whole community is invited to meet there by the orders of the *Nattamais* who send round a *jadipillai* with a tom-tom. These meetings are held during festive occasions when the temple affairs are discussed. In parliamentary language the whole community goes into a committee. Business is usually conducted by these *Nattamais* headed by their *Periadhankkaran* who is helped by the elderly people reputed for their wisdom and experience. Meetings are also convened during times when temple affairs become critical.

Ordinarily the meeting is convened to select the particular caste which is to take the responsibility of conducting the expenses of the different days of festivals. It is only people with a knowledge of the keen competition that is going on for undertaking a few minutes' stay of Lord Alagar (called *mandagapadi* in Tamil) who can realize the importance of this issue. Further, the subscription to be given from the common-funds, the orderly arrangements for processions and other kindred temple topics very often engross the attention of this *mahasabha*.

Details regarding the conduct of the meeting though meagre are valuable. It is the particular castes that elect their *Nattamais* in their separate gatherings. The stamp of impartiality is evident from the fact that *Nattamais* of other castes are also invited to attend these particular meetings. The *jadipillai* summons the caste and notifies the object of the meeting in time. The *sabha* expresses its assent by silence. In cases of competing names and moral objections, the *jadipillai* announces their names in order.

### *Gild Regulations*

Any gild which does not frame rules for the industrial efficiency of its members is sure to prove a great failure.<sup>1</sup> The system of apprentices closely akin to the Neopolitan system fixes the number of apprentices according to the nature of the craft. In every miniature workshop (termed *pattarai* in Tamil) there are two to four apprentices.<sup>1</sup> In the middle ages also 'each master had few helpers.' In Singaratope one Asary has eight to ten apprentices. Initially, these apprentices are paid a petty sum of one rupee per mensem. The

<sup>1</sup> *Vide Commons and Andrews, Principles of Labour Legislation*, p. 387.

pay rises in direct proportion to their added industrial skill. Uniformly, all the carpenters, goldsmiths, brass-smiths, blacksmiths and stone-masons repeat a proverb which runs thus: 'What the eye sees, the hand shall do.' Surely, the powers of observation and imitation are well developed through dint of experience. About the rigidity of this apprenticeship, it is quite true that in seven observed cases out of ten, the relatives of the family are taken as apprentices, the son being usually taught by the father. Again in eight out of ten known cases, the sons follow the hereditary trade. But, there is a general change from carpentry to blacksmithy and *vice versa*. One observed family consisted of four brothers—all sons of a carpenter—following four different crafts. One is a carpenter, a second is a blacksmith, a third is a brass-smith, but the fourth has resorted to the motor driver's job—a recent outlet for educated carpenters. Though they prefer apprentices of their relatives, generally they are not loath to take destitute workers from other communities and villages. It has to be *noted* that no such case was brought to the notice of the present writer. Anyway, there is no such rule here as one finds in the *Handbook of Chiteras* in Punjab, which runs thus: 'No engraver shall take in an apprentice of any class other than his. If so, the committee shall impose a fine and dismiss the apprentice.'<sup>1</sup> Such a written or implicit understanding is not found in Madura. Generally, no one condemns the work of a fellow-craftsman. It is quite possible to induce the workmen to take more apprentices and train them by means of an honorarium.

One most progressive fact with the carpenters is becoming increasingly frequent. Many carpenters' sons

<sup>1</sup> Clibborn's Committee on *Industrial Education*, part i, p. 115.

have been in the Technical School with the prospective chance of becoming maistries on thirty rupees per mensem and upwards. They have also sent some of their sons to study drawing in Madras. This surely shows that they have passed the stage of sentimental objections to any such schemes. Carpenters generally get from twelve annas to one rupee and eight annas a day; masons engaged in house-building get even three rupees a day. Another desirable feature is that goldsmiths are more and more resorting to machines engaged in drawing out fine wires out of gold. Surely, it took them more than six days to do this work now done by machines in a few minutes. If any improvements in machines are demonstrated to them they are ready to make use of these labour-saving devices.

In the *Handbook of Chiteras* there is a rule that no engraver is to accept less wages than those put down in the *Handbook*.—‘The committee finding any one violating this rule will fine him.’ Such a rule is quite essential. When such a need is put before them, the goldsmiths in particular complain that the active intervention of the courts is becoming increasingly threatening. Among the goldsmiths, there is an implicit understanding that they will charge one rupee as fee for every sovereign weight of gold. But the power to fine the man who violates this rule has not been used. It is a striking fact that the rate of wastage of one grain per pagoda weight of gold fixed forty years ago is still followed. The work of the Gild of Kasukkara Chetties in deciding the prices of gold bars and of the sovereign from day to day, is as significant as it is unbroken till to-day.

It is in the commercial aspect that all the artisans are found lacking. This is partly explicable. It is due to the economic fact that all these crafts only try to

meet the local demand. The element of catering for foreign markets is consequently unknown. Even so, the establishment of distant agencies and expensive advertisements seem to be out of place.

### *The Vaisya Gild*

A close study of the trade regulations of the Gilds of the Vaisyas at Madura brings into light one of the most useful functions of the gild. Arbitration in trade disputes has been thriving with a fair degree of success. Written agreements 'fixing the price of commodities' and regulations of a general character maintaining a commendable standard of trade morality are also to be found. Instances of social ostracism and punishments by fine for violation of gild rules have been found.) The extent of false measurement has been limited to one half-measure for a bag of fifty-four measures of cereals other than paddy and a quarter measure in the case of the latter. Trade disputes relating to commodities ranging from cereals to cloth are decided by the *Periadhanakkaran* of the particular trade aided by three to four panchayatdars.

In this connection the system of the *Periadhanakkaran* issuing chits to needy beggars which authorizes charity from the particular shops of that gild is noteworthy as a striking instance of the power of the alderman. Again, the written agreement among the Nadars about the cleansing of articles like 'mustard and onions' prior to their being sold is a suggestive detail going to strengthen the *raison d'être* of these gilds. With Prof. Radhakamal Mukherjea one has to remark that 'in the present day, the gilds confine themselves to effecting an amicable arrangement, and though they never attempt to enforce their decision about prices, the parties interested generally acquiesce.'

The ideas of these artisans as to their future are narrated in the direct form in view of their bearing on our conclusions to resuscitate these picturesque survivals. The *Periadhanakkaran*, an alderman from his experience of twenty-five years, concludes thus: 'Any attempt aiming at the strengthening of the ties is most welcome. If the Government only honours us by creating for us a *definite status*, if the Government only respects more our decisions in panchayats, we shall surely not be wanting in our efforts to take advantage of them. Any implement trying to save time is welcome, provided the consequent problem of unemployment owing to the displacement of the old implements is also solved.'

Certainly it is a true and necessary philosophy to interpret the present by the past. Certain cases cited by Prof. Thorold Rogers are on the lines suggested by our *Periadhanakkaran*. 'The London Goldsmiths' writes Prof. Rogers, 'were very early consulted in what is called the trial of the pyx; that is, the verdict that the officers of the mint had satisfied the indenture under which they were entrusted with the coinage. The Merchant Tailors were called upon to pass the cloth which was purchased for the King's army.' Similar measures intended to take the gilds into the confidence of the Government are essential if the gild is to be restored to its primeval status.

#### *The Ahamudayars' Gild*

The carpenters in the western part of Madura are to sign in stamped paper an agreement on communal lines among themselves. There is already one such signed document among the Ahamudayars (*kottamars* = house-masons). Ten years ago, a bond has been signed by about 150 people of this community. The articles

of this fast-developing organization are worth a detailed consideration. They run thus :—

(a) The Ahamudayars have formed into a corporate gild of the caste residing in Karukappilakara Street, Madura, for the lasting well-being of their community.

(b) Any brother is fined four annas who fails to obey the Articles of the Association.

(c) Every brother is bound to pay *magamai* for Mari Amman at one rupee per head.

(d) None is to work on occasions of the death of a brother.

(e) There are two *Nattamais*.

(f) None is allowed to absent himself in work save with the consent of the *Nattamai* (who of course grants leave for untoward happenings).

(g) When one member of the gild starts for another place, he is to inform the *Nattamai* of the fact. This is a novel and excellent rule from the point of view of gild economy.

(h) No one is to engage himself in work left half-done by one of his community save with the consent of the individual concerned.

On the above model, the organization among the carpenters in Sandaipettai is to be formed. The oil-mongers in the northern part of the town have already an implicit understanding among themselves, which is some decades old. They are trying to fix prices of unadulterated oil.

### *The Mirasus among Cowherds*

Another interesting relic of gild organization is the prevailing *mirasus* (tenancy-rights) among the cowherds, engaged in milching the cows. The village grazing common as also this hereditary right of tending and milching cows are as old as India itself.

The whole of Madura proper is divided into different *mirasus*, each *mirasu* extending over four to six streets. The basis of this division is their unanimous version that their ancestors, some sixty years ago, have purchased the *mirasu* for the whole of Madura. It is not exactly clear from whom they purchased this lease. It is possible, nay even probable that one of their ancestors paid a lump sum to the temple of Goddess Meenakshi. This right has been bequeathed to his rightful heirs. As an instance, the *mirasu* for Goods Shed street has been purchased for two hundred rupees. Once the purchase is recognized, it is next to impossible for any intruder to live on the milching of cows within his jurisdiction. A striking parallel is afforded by the following description occurring in the *Bengal Census Report, 1901*: 'The duties and remuneration of each group are fixed by custom and the caste rules strictly prohibit any man from entering into competition with another of the same caste. In many districts the barber, the washerman, the blacksmith, etc. (one may add cowherd also) each has his own (*brit* or *sarhan*) *defined circle*, within which he works and no one else may attempt to filch his customers or *jajmans* from him on pain of severe punishment at the hands of the Caste Committee. The exclusive right to employment by the people in the circle constituting a man's *brit* is often so well established that it is regarded as heritable property, and with Mohamedans is often granted as dower.'

### *The Gild of Pavukkara Naiks*

The most interesting community *par excellence* is that of the Pavukkara Naikkamars inhabiting the southern most portion of Madura. Their trade consists

in starching the warp given to them by the Saurashtras. Though often drunk, they have got their caste organization intact. They are situated in five localities, (1) Punjaimeedu, (2) Perumalkoil theru, (3) Kanpalayam, (4) Singaratope and (5) Pudoor.

These people have specialized in the starching of fine *pavu*. Every New Moon day, they meet in their Communal Hall at Singaratope Chavadi, and absence thereof is threatened with a fine of four annas.

### *Singara Tope Communal Hall*

This hall is according to their accounts, some centuries old; even as Prof. Thorold Rogers tells us that 'the site of the Goldsmiths' Hall has been in the possession of the craft from before the conquest.'<sup>1</sup> One member for a family is sufficient for attendance. These Pavukkaras have got their *Nattamais*. There is one *jajman* (master) for every four whose business is to find work for his four workers. They have got standards of measurement called Kali and Pinja.

The following striking incident in their recent history is at once a strong evidence and a vindication of the gild system. The Saurashtras, when they give them work, hand over to them a fixed number of pavus. A few years ago, a Saurashtra gave a customer five instead of the necessary six pavus. The whole community of Pavukkara Naiks at once struck work. It is to be remembered that this work is one of the essential stages in the dyeing of yarn. Some of the Saurashtras tried to do the work themselves. They succeeded in finishing off with the coarser variety only. All the Naiks met in their chavadi and decided to fine the weaver fifteen rupees. A community decided in their

<sup>1</sup> Roger's, *Economic Interpretation of History*, vol. i, p. 295.

Parliament to fine a member of another caste! The particular weaver was served this notice and he was threatened with exclusion. The weaver had to pay the fine for his fraudulent act.

The history of medieval gilds in England is replete with such instances as the levying of fines for internal competition. The case cited by Prof. Rogers is to the point. In the fifteenth century, the Grocer's Company levied a fine of £10 on two members of the fellowship for the offence of taking a fellow livery-man's house by offering to pay a higher rent than the occupier was paying, against such an occupier and fellow-Grocer's will. Half the fine went to the fraternity and half to him that was thus put out of his house. In fact, every regulation tending to strengthen the corporate life of the gild members finds a parallel in the history of the growth and development of medieval gilds.

Any member of the Naikkamars who worked for less than the prescribed wages would be fined fifteen rupees. The Saurashtra who gives the work for less wages is also threatened with exclusion. Their wages rise as the fineness of the yarn given for work rises from 40 to 150 counts. Every Naik gives from six annas to one rupee for Kali Amman per annum. The sources of income for *poduppanam* (common fund) consist in a contribution of one pie per rupee earned by the member. They have now collected Rs. 800. They earn from Re. 1-8-0 to Rs. 2 a day.

They have purchased lands worth Rs. 200 for religious and charitable purposes. This is an excellent illustration of the old statement that gilds no less than kings were charitably inclined.<sup>1</sup> A striking parallel is found in the statement of Prof. Rogers that 'few

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Bannerjea's *Public Administration in Ancient India*, p. 284.

parishes were probably without gild-lands from which the aged and the poor were nourished.'<sup>1</sup>

It will be an instructive economic study to compare the trade customs of this community of Pavukkara Naiks with those that prevail among the Trade Unions of England, in order to guard their members from the perils of unemployment and overstrain. 'The system of trade customs,' narrates Mr. Bloomfield, 'embraces not only the standard rates of wages and the length of the normal working day together with the arrangements for over-time, night work, Sunday duty, mealtimes and holidays, but also the exact classes of operatives—apprentices or skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled labourers or women—to be engaged or not to be engaged for various kinds of work, upon particular processes or with different types of machine; whether non-unionists should be employed at all; what process should be employed for particular tasks; what machines should be used for particular jobs; how the machines should be placed in relation to each other and the speed at which they should work; whether one operative should complete a whole job or form part of a team of specialized operatives each doing a different process, what wages if any should be paid in the interval between jobs or while waiting for material; and what notice of termination of engagement should be given; whether boys or girls should be employed at all, or in what processes or with what machines or in what proportion to the adult workmen. These customs decided whether the remuneration should be by time or by the piece and under what conditions, at what rates, and with what allowance.'<sup>2</sup> All these advanced customs cited by the painstaking author go

<sup>1</sup> Roger's *Economic Interpretation of History*, vol. i, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Vide *The New Labour Movement in Great Britain* by Mr. Bloomfield, p. 39.

into great details since these trade unions include among their fold many specialized lines of labour from engineering and ship-building to textile workers and boot and shoe operatives.

The suggestions of one of their punchayatdars are most valuable for the problem of resuscitation. 'All attempts,' continues he, 'at patching up the present quarrel are most welcome. The funds are now with the Pallatheru people, but they are to be handed over to trustees accountable to the community. The idea of brotherhood is to be so strengthened as to necessitate wholesale stoppage of work on the death of a brother belonging to any of these five streets.'

#### *Communal Organization among Barbers*

A study of the community of barbers is also illustrative of the prevalence of corporate life. The meetings of members are held whenever necessary. They have got holidays just as the Hindus; the community cherishes the memory of the dead more effectively than any of the other communities. They do not work on such days. Their meetings are not held in special halls but in gardens near by. All the members of the community go into a committee as in Chettiapatti, a village four miles north-east of Madura. There is no permanent president; generally, an old and wise man guides their deliberations. The assembled panchayat decides cases of immoral behaviour as the divorce of a wife, the kidnapping of one's wife and kindred cases.

The deliberations of a recent meeting held at Thirupparankunram on the Kartigai day are valuable.<sup>1</sup> The facts of the case that led to the meeting are as follows:—In their caste, nieces are according to time-honoured custom married to their cousins. In the

<sup>1</sup> Thirupparankunram is a holy place four miles south of Madura.

present case, such a custom was violated; so an occasion for the meeting of the punchayat was created. The plaintiff and the respondent paid as batta five rupees each for inviting their caste-men to the meeting. Barbers from Madura and thereabouts were assembled for the purpose. In the present case, the respondent was fined fifteen rupees. Happily, he abided by their decision. Once the two parties abide by a decision, they at once sign a bond called in Tamil *Thuyaramuri*, (lit. a pledge not to go against the decision) thereby sealing up solemnly the past. In a recent meeting held six months ago, they have raised their rates, as a result of the high prices of foodstuffs.

### *The Saurashtra Sabha*

The community of Saurashtras constitutes perhaps the most enterprising folk in Madura. The large colony of Saurashtras from Gujerat was encouraged to settle in Madura by the Naik rulers and these silk-weavers became one of its chief elements.<sup>1</sup> The affairs of the Saurashtras at Madura are managed by a 'Saurashtra Sabha' started in 1895. Its objects as evident from their Memorandum of Association and an intimate knowledge of some of their institutions are as follows :—

1. To manage a school to enable members of their community to receive on moderate terms a sound, liberal, general and technical education. The Saurashtra High School is maintained by this Sabha.

2. To run the Sri Prasanna Venkateswara-swami's temple and contribute towards its maintenance—making jewels, vehicles and other things necessary therefor and conducting the festivals thereof.

<sup>1</sup> For a study of this community, *vide* the present writer's forthcoming treatise on *The Madura Saurashtra Community*.

3. To found charitable institutions such as choultries, poor houses, etc., for the good of the community.
4. To give succour to the suffering, poor and the ' maimed, the lame and the blind ' in the community.
5. To give pecuniary grants in aid of *Upanayanams* (Thread marriages) to the indigent orphans.
6. To erect such works of public utility as bathing ghauts, wells, etc.
7. To promote the social, moral, and intellectual advancement of the Saurashtras.
8. To fix and raise subscriptions known as *mahamais* in such manner as the Association may from time to time think of.
9. To sell, improve, manage, develop, lease, mortgage, turn to account or otherwise deal with all or any part of the property of the Association.

For the fulfilment of the above objects, certain gild dues are being levied to add to the corpus of the funds. The members have on the sale proceeds contributed to the funds of the Association as stated below :—

1. Local manufacturers of cloths and dyers of foreign piece-goods through brokers—one pie per rupee. (Brokers shall also contribute at the above rate on the total invoice amount.)
2. Dealers in cloths of Benares, Cashmere, Kumbakonam, Kornad, Conjeevaram, Salem, Swamimalai and Pillaiyarpalayam—half a pie per rupee..
3. Dealers in gold-thread—four pies per high standard marc.
4. Dealers in gold thread—one pie per low standard marc.
5. Wholesale dealers in cotton yarn and foreign piece-goods—half an anna per Rs. 100 sale.
6. Retail dealers in white cotton yarn—one pie per bundle.

7. Retail dealers in coloured cotton yarn—one pie per bundle.
8. Dealers in locally-dyed cotton yarn—half a pie per rupee.
9. Dealers in alizarine dye-stuffs—one anna per barrel.
10. Dealers in aniline colours—one anna per lb.
11. Dealers in dyed silk—four pies per seer.
12. Dealers in different oils—one anna per Rs. 100.
13. Dealers in iron—one anna per Rs. 100.
14. Dealers in different grains and other sundry articles of consumption—one anna per Rs. 100.
15. Stake-holders in chits shall contribute a quarter of an anna per rupee on the amount of the stake. The exceptionally strong *esprit de corps* of this Sabha is due in no small measure to these rules which may look a bit 'loosely co-ordinated including as it does the artisans, the middlemen and the dealers' who are all brought under the same caste.

In Madura the Saurashtras have made several attempts to introduce improved machinery. Warping is not usually done through the ordinary method—walking up and down a long line sticks—but the thread is wound on to a series of iron pegs arranged on a square wooden frame. This in turn enables the work to be done indoors and in all weathers.<sup>1</sup> Several patents are in vogue, a striking example is the patent taken out of a modification of the country-loom which enables it to weave figures on the borders of cloths. One notable achievement is peculiarly due to the skill of Madura. The Saurashtras have improved the dyeing process and they have succeeded in maintaining the

<sup>1</sup> *Madura Gazetteer*, vol. i, p. 8.

efficacy of the native vegetable pigments in the face of the competition of aniline and alizarine compounds.

Another interesting factor of domestic economy is the proper utilization of women labour. In Lakshmi-puram Lane, women (young and old) and children of seven years and above, do much of the preliminary work as preparing the warp. The following table taken from the latest Census Report<sup>1</sup> serves to indicate the important part played by Saurashtra women in their industrial life :—

	Occupation	No. of female workers per 1000 males
1	Cotton spinners and weavers ...	274
2	Silk spinners and weavers ...	369
3	Dyers and bleachers ...	1295

Closest secrecy is maintained in preserving their trade secrets. Even in the employment of non-Saurashtra labour in the dyeing process, this point is as a rule strictly followed. Only Saurashtra workmen are engaged in the steaming process. In fact wherever an element of brainwork is wanted, the Saurashtra maistries alone are welcomed.

More than anything which this study portrays, the writer was moved by the spirit of co-operation and attachment among the members of both the sexes. Every new moon day, people of all the four adjoining streets meet under the *Arasu* tree. They collect at the rate of one pie per rupee as *magamai*. The Saurashtra Sabha is leaving no stone unturned to make the Saurashtra alphabet popular in the community and diffuse it

<sup>1</sup> *The Census of India 1921*, vol. xiii, p. 220.

among them. This is truly a step bound to strengthen the *esprit de corps* in the community.

### *The Muhammadan Blacksmiths*

The Muhammadan blacksmiths of Madura have also got their gild with the *peria* (big) Natamdar and *chinna* (small) Natamdar, *peria kudithanakkars*, crier, and *Modian* of the mosque corresponding to the *jadipillais*. A mosque and an Arabic School are maintained and collections on the 27th day of Ramzan are made for the festival. Their punchayat collects fees on occasions of marriage and circumcision and it settles all kinds of disputes.

## CHAPTER III

### RURAL GILDS

'There are even now certain spheres of village life into which the statutory forms of administration have not penetrated and in which keen observers can detect something of the organization of old Times.'—*Dr. John Matthai.*<sup>1</sup>

WHEN Mr. (now Sir) Alfred Chatterton wrote in 1902 that he was not 'aware of the existence of any trade gilds in the Madras Presidency, except at Madura,' he should have had in mind a finished type of gild with all its activities well-marked and distinct in tone. Throughout South India, every village has till to-day many relics of the self-sufficed gild activity of ancient times in the survivals of important trade customs and the fairly complete working of the existing corporations functioning effectively in many rural localities. Some representative rural gilds from different districts have been sketched in this chapter.

#### *At Keeranur*

In Keeranur, a Musalman stronghold, there is an effective gild organization, in spite of the fact that one of their decisions in their punchayat has been taken up for appeal to the Madura Sub-court. Every Friday, they decide disputes in the mosque; and fines to the amount of twenty rupees have been levied from the culprits. The punchayat is used to consist of eight to twelve members. In cases of acute disputes, an equal number from both the parties in a controversy is constituted as the punchayat. The Sunni sect is determined to strengthen the gild.

<sup>1</sup> *Agricultural Co-operation in India*, p. 171.

*In the Tinnevelly District*

In Kadayam, there is a strong organization among the Nadars. The number of palmyra trees from which toddy is tapped is fixed for each Nadar through hereditary usage. Cases of violation are severely dealt with in their caste-gatherings. The Nadar community is well organized communally and with the aid of common collections they are maintaining educational institutions for their caste at Mayavaram in the Tanjore District and Virudunagar in the Ramnad District.

In Pattamadai, a village in Tinnevelly District, a famous centre of the matting industry in South India, there is a strong understanding among the Ravuthars with reference to the fixing of price of different textures of mats. Prices for a mat range from six annas to one hundred and twenty rupees. It is still held a close trade secret so far as the weaving of the finer textures of mats is concerned. This matting industry which is more than 150 years old continues *local* so far as the processes are concerned.

Among the Kuyavas (potters) of the Tinnevelly District, there is a peculiar custom which is a strong relic of gild organization. The *pujaris* or special families of Kusavas make painted hollow clay images for the temples of Ayyanar and other guardian deities. The painting of hollow clay images is a privilege enjoyed by this section, and for enjoying this privilege, they pay an annual fee to the headman, who spends it on a festival at the caste temple.

*In Salem District*

Among the Kaikkolas (weavers) of Dharmapuri and Adamankottai, the weaving processes continue self-centered in the community; and an inscription at

Adamankottai testifies to the fact of a *sunkam* or toll-gate fee of three pies per rupee set apart for the preservation of the Angalamman Temple.

*In South Arcot District*

In Sendanur, all the villagers to a man dig the channel across the bed of the Pennaiyar for the benefit of their village. The duty of a particular village to construct the channel is sacred and obligatory on its occupants.



A GILD TEMPLE IN THE SOUTH ARCOT DISTRICT

In Siruvalai, the Parayas meet during moonlight nights in a temple-tope whenever cases of adultery and

other moral offences occur in the community. There is a headman, besides two other elders and there are two servants of the punchayat standing with staves in their hands. In a case of proved adultery, the offender is ordered to pass through the legs of the lady standing upon two stone slabs and he is sprinkled over with cowdung water to show the disgust of the punchayat. A heavy fine not exceeding Rs. 50 is inflicted on him, failing payment of which, the offender is excommunicated from the community. The fines collected are spent by the assembly for a common purpose.

In Karungudi of the Chidambaram Taluq, the Padayachis collect four annas per head per annum for their common expenses. There is one *Nattamai* and four elders constituting the punchayat. Meetings are held in the Mari Amman temple whose festivals are celebrated on a grand scale by the community. Fines collected for cases of moral delinquency go to the common funds; and they also collect money during the Kaman Pandigai. In 1920, a debaucherous woman of the community was excommunicated and she lives in a neighbouring village.

### *The Komuties of Vriddhachalam*

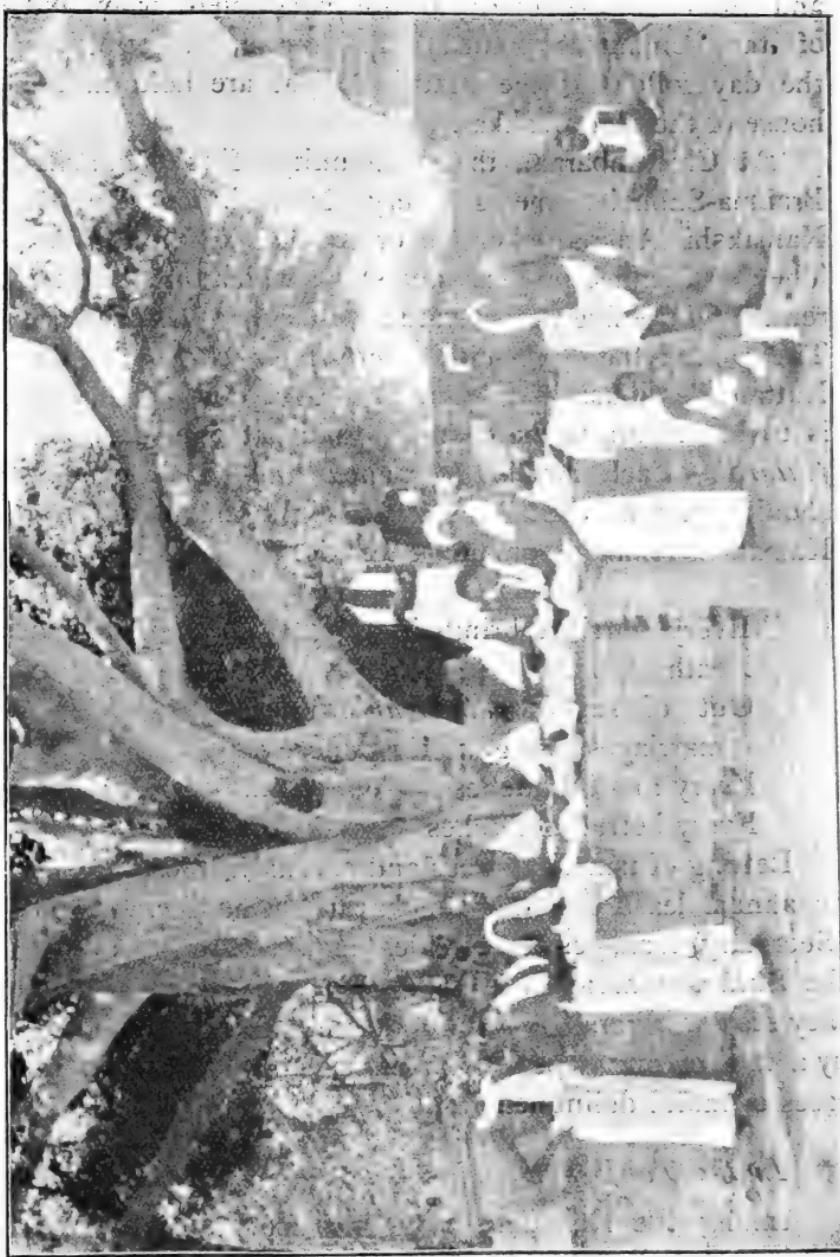
At Vriddhachalam among the Komuti Chetties, there is a hereditary Nattamakkars. They meet once a month in their Kanyakaparameswari Temple. Cases of breach of morals, defamatory action and the like are settled and occasionally fines to the extent of ten rupees to twenty-five rupees are levied and these fines are added to the corpus of the communal funds. These Chetties have also purchased a communal garden of flowers where they are also cultivating plantains and cabbages. The annual income of Rs. 200 from the garden as also the rentals of their communal shops are

added to the common funds. Further, a sum of Rs. 2,000 has been invested for interest among their own members. They conduct the festivals of the temples. Occasional religious lectures are also held. Subscriptions are levied for occasional holding of Ramayanam lectures. Every year, they auction the brokerage of the shops to sums ranging from Rs. 300 to Rs. 500, which go to the corpus of the common funds. Marriages for the poor of the community are held by the punchayatdars.

At Vilampatti in the Kallakurichi Taluq, there is an efficient system of the indigenous punchayats among the Vannias. The Nattamadar is a hereditary post; and there are four other punchayatdars to help him. The proceeds of the *common fund* are from the following sources :—

1. Sub-letting of puramboke and bunds of tanks as at Madukkarai near Pondicherry.
2. The auction of *tharahus* (brokerage) once a year on the day following the Mattu Pongal in cases of sale of paddy, cattle, sugar, and groundnut.
3. The sub-letting of the fish in the lake which fetches an annual income of Rs. 40.
4. Fines for breach of the moral code to the extent of Rs. 10 per occurrence. They perform the annual *utsavam* during *Panguni* (March to April) to Lord Subrahmanya. There is an annual meeting at the gramachavady on the day following Mattu Pongal. Other meetings are held when civil and criminal cases require decision.

At Kilapattu in the Kallakurichi Taluq, the punchayat among the *Vellalas* is working under a *Nattamai*. The sub-letting of puramboke, the auctioning of *tharahus*, and fines for offences—are the important sources of income. The *utsavams* of the Mari Amman Temple



A PUNCHAVAT MEETING IN SOUTH ARCOT DISTRICT

and Soundararaja Perumal are conducted from out of the communal funds. The annual meeting on the day following the Mattu Pongal are held in the house of the Nattamakkars.

At Chidambaram, the community of the Pancha-Brahma-Sabhaiars meets every New Moon day at Kamakshi Amman Temple or at the common mutt. They own landed property and shops which they hire for rent. Of the five punchayatdars, one is a *Kariasthar*. The ash of the goldsmith's *pattarai* is carried to the Nattamai's house and let to the *Aruppukkaran* who is to contribute to the common funds at one rupee per *pattarai*. Each *tacchan* (carpenter and stone mason) should pay a contribution of eight annas to the Kamakshi Amman communal temple.

	RS	A	P
Every marriage brings in	....	2	8
Death	....	1	4
Out of seven <i>paladanams</i> during marriages, five go to the punchayat			
Every nuptial fetches	....	1	4
Every betrothal fetches	....	1	4

Letting of tamarind trees and cocoanut trees fetches an annual lease for the punchayat. The *Karyasthan* (Secretary) manages the temples and yearly celebrates the Sura Samharam Festival. Every New Moon day they stop work and a breach of this rule is punished by a fine of one rupee. Special meetings are held in cases of moral delinquencies.

#### *In the Tanjore District—The Dasaries' Gild*

Among the Dasaries, a Telugu-speaking class of religious mendicants, of Chikkanaikkampettai and Thri-loki in the Kumbakonam Taluq, there is a very strong corporate feeling. A *Nattamai* is elected for good

behaviour who presides over the punchayat gatherings. There is a small committee of elders who assist the Nattamakkars. They meet in a temple tope in Kannarakkudi, a central locality, once in three years, when every representative of the community hies to the station from distant Penang, Rangoon and Madras. They also meet once a year for carrying on routine business when outsiders are not obliged to come. The triannual meeting may even last for weeks according to the nature of business. Moral offences, civil claims within the community and as against outsiders also if one of their community is a debtor, and crimes within the community, are all settled. All marriages are registered in the punchayat. Erring husbands and misbehaving wives are here reconciled if possible after a heavy fine which goes to the common funds. In the Thirupanandal and Pandanallur firkas every member of the community has a *varthanai* in two or three villages of blowing conch in the early mornings during the month of *Margali* (December–January). They are remunerated in kind during Pongal.

In Kodangudi of the Shiyali Taluq, the Semburayar caste meets every New Moon day in their temple. Every marriage gets one rupee and they pay twelve annas for other ceremonial occasions to the caste funds. Marriages are always settled through the good offices of the headman. They settle disputes in their own gatherings. Absence during marriages is punished by a fine of four annas and every death fetches eight annas to the common coffers.

### *The Kallars of Ariyalur*

Among the Kallars of Madura and Trichinopoly Districts, the community implicitly obeys the Ambalakar or headman. Cases of theft of cattle are successfully

traced if referred to their caste-punchayat; and moral offences are effectively punished through excommunication if necessary. The accused during all such special gatherings of the punchayat are to pay expenses of the gatherings which may extend to three or four days.

### *The Kaikkolas of Udayarpalayam*

Among the Kaikkolas (weavers) of Udayarpalayam in Trichinopoly District, the old communal arrangements continue effectively. Each *nadu* has four villages and each village has one *Nattamai* and four *Tharahus* (Brokers). Every *nadu* has also one *Nattamai* and four *Tharahus*. Their caste divisions of territorial distribution may thus be represented:—

Head-quarter's *Nadu* at Conjeeveram.  
 ↓  
*Nadu* (head of four villages)  
 ↓  
 Village—1 *Nattamai* and 4 *Tharahus*

There is an appeal from the Village *Nattamai* to the *Nadu Nattamai*. Above all the *nadus* there is the headquarters' *nadu* at Conjeeveram for the whole community.

The *Nadu Nattamai* has got the power of excommunicating the offender. The meeting usually takes place in the house of one of the *Tharahus*. Factions in one village are referred to the *Nattamai* and pending final decision, a stay in further proceedings is ordered. The *Nattamai* is consulted for all marriages and he has the first *thambulam* (betel and nuts) during ceremonial occasions. A collection of eight annas per Thari every year and the fines levied go towards the common fund. The *nadus* and villages zealously watch the interests of the community.

## CHAPTER IV

### ‘LINES OF RESUSCITATION’

The spirit of association has in all ages induced men to join together for the pleasures of mutual enjoyment or for the attainment of some common purpose for which the support of members was necessary.—*Miss L. Toulmin Smith* in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

AFTER an examination of the available materials touching the existing corporate strength of the Madura gilds, of the Kaikkola organization in Udayarpalayam (Trichy District) of the Dasaries of Chikkanaikkampettai (Tanjore) of the Komuties of Vriddhachalam (S. Arcot) and of the weavers of Adamankottai (Salem)—to mention only a representative few—constructive economic criticism consists in the arduous work of resuscitation. Under modern conditions of economic competition, all ancient institutions are in varying stages of disruption; but since the groundwork still remains intact it does afford a basis for *re-formation*. Suffice it initially to note here that the resuscitation of these gilds of ancient renown, will solve many a difficulty in making the village organism as well as the *bourgeois* class with their occupational organs, healthy and strong.<sup>1</sup>

Here as elsewhere, before passing to an enunciation of the vital principles of reform, the general lines of remedy suggested by the illustrious authors of the Industrial Commission Report have an effective bearing on the *raison d'être* of a gild economy amidst modern conditions. The artisan's conservatism, lack of ambition and present inability to appreciate a high standard of

<sup>1</sup> *Travancore Census Report for 1911*, vol. i, p. 276.

living have to be dispelled progressively through education. Children of artisans ought to be encouraged to follow their hereditary trade, thereby accelerating the speed and skill of specialization. Better plants and tools are to be employed and existing ones improved. The part of the Government has been suggested by way of demonstration. Industrial training is to be imparted where insistence must initially be made on quality; co-operative credit is to be introduced. It has been observed that urban artisans do not combine in co-operative organizations with unlimited liability. So, the Schultze-Delitsch type where two persons stand as guarantee can be introduced, aided by Urban Banks. In cases where co-operative credit cannot reach, the Government should grant small loans and supply tools and plant on the hire-purchase system. Useful results have been achieved in Mysore by sending round a skilled blacksmith and his assistant, provided with suitable tools to teach village artisans improved methods of smithy. Happily, the advantages of stamping, pressing, and spinning metal through machines have been well understood by the Pancha-Brahma-Sabhaiar of Madura and Chidambaram. Further, the opening up of new markets after the Japanese example is bound to lend due weight to the skill of the artisan. Enterprise, organization, and marketting through efficient advertisement, establishment of commercial agencies and exhibits are essential to all trades in this era of commercialism. Government should further grant takavi loans on landed security for costly machinery and plant.

The lines of resuscitation that follow have mostly been suggested to the present writer by the heads of the trade castes and businessmen connected with the trade. Some others were pointed out to the witnesses who heartily approved of them. The *Periadhanakkaran*

of the Pancha-Brahma-Sabhai insists upon the' *Legal* recognition of the *status of the gild*. This is to, be achieved through the creation of honoured Sir Panchs who are to be respected by the local revenue officers on State occasions for the services they render to the caste in managing the corporate economy of the gilds. Bold institution and able management of gild schools are striking illustrations. In all matters touching their trade, they should be consulted by the Government. The created select body of local punchayat must be revered as becoming the *guardians* of the city.

Further, the Government can create a demand for the wares of the gild artisans. The carved tables of Madura, the sandal and ivory work of Vizagapatam, the toys of Kondapalli, the brass-fishes of Ganjam, the palampores of the Kistna District, the mats of Pattamadai, the lacquered ware of Kurnool, the flower-vases and earthenware of Karagiri—all these cottage industries which are thriving under the old gild economy deserve to be widely known to the world at large. The work done by the British Empire Exhibition of 1924 in this direction is highly valuable from an economic point of view.

As the Superintendent of the School of Arts writes in a note on 'Village Industries,' 'there seems to be no dearth of industrial talent, but many industries are small and insignificant either owing to very limited markets or lack of knowledge by others beyond their immediate neighbourhood who might, if the industries were better-known, become good customers.'<sup>1</sup>

The problem of the survival of these home industries amidst modern competitive conditions can be only touched by these gilds when sufficiently organized.

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of the Madras Exhibition, 1916*, p. 436.

As the enthusiast on gild socialism has it 'if the medieval system has lessons for us, they are not parrot-lessons of slavish imitation, but lessons of the spirit, by which we may learn how to build up, on the basis of large scale production and the world-market, a system of industrial organization that appeals to the finest human motives and is capable of developing the tradition of free communal service.'<sup>1</sup>

Further, the lesson of the home industries in Ireland—as the manufacture of home-spuns, hand-knitting, lace-making, embroidery and carpet-making—is that 'although a certain amount of work may be produced which is of such excellence that it commands a sure market, when the industry is more widespread the standard falls and it is necessary to adopt a commercial method of marketing.'<sup>2</sup> Thus the establishment of striking commercial depots in foreign countries where a neat exhibit of the work of the artisans should exist, is advisable. The 'gild registries or exchanges' in Germany which have been found to strengthen 'small industry' also (handwork) are very suggestive.<sup>3</sup> Above all, the presence of an affectionate and sympathetic treatment from above will strengthen the efficacy of these gilds. The reply of Mr. B. A. Gupte, Bombay, graphically describes the well-reasoned apprehension of the artisans in South India as well. Verily 'artisans have the greatest dread of the native officials; because if purchases are made through them a certain portion of the proceeds is appropriated, if medals or diplomas are distributed through them, a certain nazrana has to be paid, if a peon goes to call them he gets something and

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Gild Socialism restated*, by G. D. H. Cole, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Rural Reconstruction in Ireland*, by Smith-Gordon and Staples, p. 208.

<sup>3</sup> *Unemployment, A Problem of Industry*, by W. H. Beveridge, p. 240.

if an European dealer is taken to their house they fear the early ruin of their trade.'<sup>1</sup>

Assistance of an *indirect nature* is equally essential. Surely every communal effort which attempts *bona-fide* at bettering their industrial and social prospects, should be favourably viewed by those in power. As Mr. Bell suggested, every expert adviser should make it a point of meeting the artisans in their punchayat, talking to them on trade matters and giving them advisory lectures. It is difficult to describe the kindly feelings of confidence such a treatment generates. In no case should the Government directly interfere in their deliberations, provided of course there be no infringement of law and order. Such an indirect help is essential in India where the cottage industries are bound to survive since they have stood the test of time and also continued to satisfy the local demand.

The most reasonable plea for the resuscitation of these gilds lies in their effective *rôle* in this era of world-wide economic reconstruction. When correctly run, these serve the training-ground of able self-management of affairs.

Further, if these indigenous institutions only thrive well, many of the undesirable extra-developments of the industrial West can be nipped in the bud. As Mr. Gilchrist says, 'it is to be hoped, that if India is to be industrialized, she will be able to retain some of the more beautiful of her social institutions'; and these gilds are among a few of the precious remnants of ancient India.<sup>2</sup> When the mutual aid aspect of these gilds is effectively understood, the need for the enactment of Poor Laws will have to be proved in India.

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Industrial Education Report*, 1903, Part ii, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> R. N. Gilchrist, *Wages and Profit-sharing*, p. 249.

At best, the history of Poor Laws in England is not sufficiently re-assuring.

A well-organized gild is in fact positively useful to the Government. In cases of famine, leper problem, infant mortality and the spread of other contagious diseases, an intelligent and well-equipped body like the gild will be a great promoter of social happiness. In fact, all Governments can reach the governed, however representative be the Government only till a certain length, and such quasi-legal and public bodies like gilds which move with the daily run of life of every citizen can alone give effective execution to the ordinances of the Government.

These caste-gilds might form themselves into a statistical and economic bureau. Further it is surely possible to create with the assistance of the gilds, a system of 'trade marks' as a guarantee of good quality. The famous Edict of 1671 by the great French Minister of Commerce, Colbert, serves well as a good example of how these gilds can be made use of. 'If bad cloth is produced,' so runs the edict, 'specimens of it are to be exposed on a stake with a ticket attached giving the name of the delinquent. If the same fault is committed again, the master or the workman who is at fault shall be censured in the meeting of the gild. In the event of a third offence, the guilty person shall himself be tied to the post for two hours, with a specimen of the faulty product tied to him.'

The efficient working of the punchayats of the United Provinces is not without its lessons on the future of these gilds. It has been recorded that in Haldaur in the district of Bignor (United Provinces) 'a punchayat of sugar-refiners is held annually which settles the price to be paid to the cultivators for raw sugar and the rate so fixed is accepted as a standard over the whole district.'

Further in Benares, close industrial corporations of weavers and dealers in gold threads are reported 'to exercise a general supervision of the conditions of apprenticeship.' Thus, whether it be in the effective rôle of fixing the price of a particular commodity or the close supervision of the indigenous system of apprentices—where many improvements are badly wanted—the gild has a prominent future before it.

In a 'continent' like India, where more than seventy-five per cent of the people are directly or indirectly interested in agriculture, these gilds may effectively supplement the efforts of the Agricultural Department in the introduction and trial of improved modes of cultivation. Each gild can act as a local agricultural association and introduce costly agricultural implements on the hire-purchase system to the ryots.

Again, wasteful law suits might be curtailed, if these local punchayats are given effective power to decide cases initially in their courts before they are carried to His Majesty's courts. 'Truly, the growing increase in litigation and land alienation and what is a natural corollary, the insatiable cry for more and more Courts and registration offices, must bear the same import in reference to the healthiness of the body politic as the increasing endemicity of disease and the need for hospitals and dispensaries in correspondence would to that of the body physical.'<sup>1</sup>

The value of an economic study at a certain place gets an added strength when corroboration comes in from distant and unexpected quarters. The intelligible conclusion lies in the fact that there is a strong case for the resuscitation of Indian gilds. Whether it be in Bombay, the United Provinces or South India, word for

<sup>1</sup> *Travancore Census Report for 1911*, vol. i, p. 304.

word, custom for custom, there is an underlying *fundamental unity*. Surely, it is not an accidental coincidence when the rules of the *Handbook of Chiteras* and the *Mirror of Goldsmiths* in distant Lahore have been observed by the engravers and goldsmiths of Madura, Chidambaram and Vriddhachalam in South India. The obvious conclusion is that in all these distant places, these customs have been honoured even as the concentrated essence of the wisdom and experience of ages.

The whole world is still in the balance and institutions like men are to be judged in their prime. The periods of growth, progress and decay summarize the history of all institutions. Even so, the trade gilds of South India have witnessed all the natural processes from the sixth century B. C. (to quote only recent historical times). From *srenis* and *pugas* which are summoned by kings, through the highly developed caste-guilds 'under the rule and patronage of the Moghul Emperors' to the Pancha-Brahma-Sabhai, the Pavukkara Naikka<sup>1</sup> mars, the Saurashtra weavers of Madura, the Dasaries of Chikkanaikkampettai (Tanjore), the Komuties of Vriddhachalam (South Arcot), the Kaikkolas of Adamankottai (Salem), the weavers of Udayarpalayam (Trichinopoly) and the Ravuthars of Pattamadai (Tinnevelly) whose existence has to be unearthed,—it is surely a long and doleful tale. But, the contention of the present writer is, that even as everything Indian, after 'letting the legions thunder past,' India has preserved her distinct *personality* in the form of these gilds which are solving partially and bound to solve fully many of the 'isms' of the West, as socialism, syndicalism and bolshevism, if the suggested lines of resuscitation are well considered by those in power.

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Rajani Kanta Das, *Factory Labour in India*, p. 3.

## SELECT OPINIONS

1. Professor P. Carty, B. Sc. (Paris), Professor of Economics, South India, writes:—

‘ Mr. K. R. R. Sastry’s monograph on the modern South Indian Gilds makes one acquainted with an interesting institution. The author has spared himself no trouble to learn the facts by personal investigation and inquiry; and his results are embodied in a neat work the contents of which are bound to prove useful to all those who have at heart the study of Indian economic conditions. Not satisfied with a mere transcription of cut and dry data, Mr. Sastry offers some valuable suggestions for the improvement of an institution which has played an important part in the economic life of this country and which may still afford a precious help in solving the industrial problem with which India is now confronted.’

2. *The Royal Economic Journal*, London, June, 1923, p. 276 in its review:—

‘ The work contains notes on the remains of gild organizations among craftsmen of (South India) with suggestions as to the means of strengthening it.’

## APPENDIX

### ENQUIRY

#### A. Is Trade organized in Gilds?

- (1) Name of the gild.
- (2) When established?
- (3) Are meetings held periodically? If not, when last held?
- (4) Where meetings are held?
- (5) Business days and holidays?
- (6) Any tradition associated with the gild?

#### B. Constitution of the Gild

- (1) Is there a Working Committee? If so, the composition of the Committee.
- (2) Is there a President or a *Mukhya*? If so, his functions.
- (3) Rules and Regulations. Is there an amending power vested in any body?
- (4) Powers of the Executive Committee. Can they levy fines for the infringement of prescribed rules?
- (5) Are directors (if any) responsible for the conduct of the members?
- (6) Business honesty. Whether the punchayat can ostracize or excommunicate moral offenders? Whether adulteration is disapproved?

#### C. Powers and Responsibilities of the Gilds

##### I. MUTUAL BENEFIT OF MEMBERS

- (1) Any *poduppanam* for the Kali or Kamakshi temple? For religious feasts?
- (2) Is there a holiday for the death of a fellow-worker?
- (3) Do they help the poor and the destitute among them?
- (4) Is any allowance made for sickness, out of work days, accidents and old age?

## II. INDUSTRIAL EFFICIENCY

(i) *Apprenticeship*

- (1) What system followed ?
- (2) Is the nature of the work determined by the demand ?
- (3) Is the number of apprentices determined by the nature of the craft ?
- (4) Are beginners paid ? Or only a small wage varying with their skill ?
- (5) Do the apprentices pay fees for learning the art ?
- (6) Is the training only confined to the family ?
- (7) Duration of the apprenticeship.

(ii) *High Quality of the Work*

- (1) Are rates of work settled by them ?
- (2) Can any one condemn the work done by fellowman ?
- (3) Can any one take an apprentice of a different class ?
- (4) Has the Committee only got the power of choosing the apprentice ? If so, can the Committee fine the artisan for wrong selection and thence dismiss the apprentice ?
- (5) Are skilful maistries selected to train boys ? Or do the boys learn only under their father or nearest relative irrespective of skill ?
- (6) Can the best men be induced to take more apprentices and train them ?
- (7) Are they fixing the hours of labour ?
- (8) Do children of artisans follow their hereditary trade ?
- (9) Are not children put to work too soon in order to add to the family savings ?
- (10) Are better tools and plant employed after demonstration ?
- (11) Any training of master workman ?

(iii) *Missions to study Industrial Processes Abroad*

- (1) Any migration inland for learning particular processes ?
- (2) Foreign missions, if any ?
- (3) Any schools of general training, as evening classes ?

## III. COMMERCIAL ASPECT

- (1) Are they disposing of the wares of its members to their advantage by combination ?
- (2) Have they hitherto had recourse to strikes ?

- (3) As in the case of lapidaries, goldsmiths and peasants—where there is no employer between the craftsmen and the public—do they regulate prices ?
- (4) Any attempt to buy cheaper credit ?
- (5) Any attempt to cater for foreign markets ?
- (6) Business side. Is advertisement known ?
- (7) Are there establishments of commercial agencies for the disposal of goods ?
- (8) Do they deal with the commission to brokers as in Sind ?

#### D. Their Resuscitation

- (1) Any suggestion of the headman as to their future ?
- (2) Lines of resuscitation.